

## The Iron Age and Persian Periods in Jordan

### Historiography of Iron Age Archaeology in Jordan

The objective of this paper is to look back over the wealth of data concerning the Iron Age and Persian periods in Jordan gathered in the last twenty years—the new discoveries, new methodologies, fresh interpretations—and to assess how this data can pay out in future research. Twenty years ago the evidence available was quite different from now. Few large-scale excavations of Iron Age sites had yet been undertaken, and none were yet published. In the north there were Dayr 'Allā and as-Sa'idiyya, in central Jordan Ḥisbān, and in the south Umm al-Biyāra, Ṭawilān, Buṣayra and Khalayfī. Of those, today, still only Ṭawilān, Khalayfī and as-Sa'idiyya (Pritchard's excavations) have been published (Bennett and Bienkowski 1995; Pratico 1993; Pritchard 1985). It is rather a truism that the main aim of excavators at that time was to investigate biblical connections and firmly identify sites named in the Bible. Often there were additional aims—at Ḥisbān to broaden the archaeological picture of Jordan (Merling and Geraty 1994: 7), at Buṣayra to provide a chronology for Edom (Bennett 1973: 4 n.14)—but there is no doubt that biblical connections were foremost for excavators and sponsors: to test if Ḥisbān was biblical Heshbon (Merling and Geraty 1994: 7), if Buṣayra was biblical Bozrah (Bennett 1973: 4), if Ṭawilān was biblical Teman (Bennett and Bienkowski 1995: 16), if Umm al-Biyāra was biblical Sela (Bennett 1966)—and of course this approach in Jordan goes right back to Nelson Glueck at Tall al-Khalayfī, which he identified, wrongly, as biblical Ezion Geber (Pratico 1993: 1-6, 17-22).

This is not to say that scholars were not interested in other aspects. McGovern's regional work north-west of 'Ammān was just beginning (McGovern 1986; 1989). The proceedings of the first of the conferences on the history and archaeology of Jordan, held in Oxford in 1980, shows plenty of interest in the Iron Age, specifically in relations with neighbouring regions: Egypt (Redford 1982), Arabia (Parr 1982), Assyria (Bennett 1982). But of course there was not much solid evidence to play with.

This was recognised, especially the lack of systematic surveys of large parts of Jordan, and it is about that time that Rast and Schaub's survey of the Dead Sea Plain (e.g. Rast and Schaub 1974), Miller's survey of the Karak Plateau (Miller 1991) and MacDonald's survey of Wādī al-Ḥasā (MacDonald 1988) began to fill that gap. Since then, of course, many other systematic surveys have been undertaken, some period-specific.

It is easy to criticise some of these older excavations and to bemoan the poor excavating technique, record keeping and lack of publication. It should be remembered, though, that working conditions, and the state of the field of Near Eastern archaeology, were quite different from today. For example, interpretation of Bennett's excavations is problematic, but her excavating technique and record keeping were considered standard practice at the time, and many of the difficulties encountered in her excavations were due to still uncertain political conditions and a very different transport infrastructure than we have today (Bennett and Bienkowski 1995: 16-17). These older excavations have their problems and they are difficult to interpret, but they contain very useful data and they are still worth publishing.

### The Beginning of the Iron Age

Some of the questions that are still on the research agenda now were already being broached twenty years ago, and they have still not been resolved. A major theme is the beginning of the Iron Age in Jordan: the nature and date of the formation of the Iron Age states. This subject was already of interest to Glueck (see conveniently Sauer 1986), and was later covered by Weippert (1982) and Dornemann (1982). In recent years it has been a major topic of research (Bienkowski 1992). Essentially, the question is: how, when and why were the states of Ammon, Moab and Edom formed? One aspect of this question which has clarified in recent years is that these states are no longer automatically grouped together. It is quite clear that they had different histories, and indeed the ev-



idence suggests that they originated at different times.

We have moved a long way forward since the hypothesis of Glueck, who saw all three states as beginning in about the 13th century BC and continuing to about the 6th, with a subsequent gap in the Persian period (cf. Sauer 1986). The evidence from Ammon, Moab and Edom varies considerably. It has often been pointed out that in Ammon there are several substantial walled settlements which show continuity from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age: 'Umayrī, Saḥāb, Šāfūt, Umm ad-Danānīr (LaBianca and Younker 1995: 407). Indeed, 'Umayrī is the largest fortified Iron I settlement in the southern Levant (Clark 1994; Herr *et al.* 1997: 14-15).

Perhaps just outside Ammon (Herr 1992), Dayr 'Allā (van der Kooij 1993) and as-Sa'idiyya (Pritchard 1985; Tubb 1988) certainly show continuity from Late Bronze to Iron I; occupation at as-Sa'idiyya continued uninterrupted possibly into the Hellenistic period, but at Dayr 'Allā there was a gap in early Iron II. Nevertheless, it is difficult to know how to deal with these northern sites. The Jordanian Iron Age is often neatly categorised as the period of the national states, Ammon, Moab and Edom, so where does the north fit in? At different times, according largely to the Bible, it was under the rule of Israel, Aram or Ammon. In the Bible the area is called Gilead, but not a single Iron Age inscription, even from Assyria, mentions the name Gilead (Bienkowski in press). It must be admitted that we are still ignorant of the political structures of the north during the Iron Age, unless we rely on the biblical record (as, for example, Herr 1997). In the far north, Tall al-Fukhār (Strange 1997: 402) and Abū al-Kharaz (Fischer 1996) also show continuity from Late Bronze to Iron I.

In Moab, the situation is a little different from the north. So far, there is no clear evidence for continuity of settlements from the Late Bronze Age into the Iron Age (Dearman 1992: 72). However, this situation is not clear-cut. Part of the problem is that the further south in Jordan you go, the less you find classic tall sites (LaBianca and Younker 1995: 406-7). The different environmental conditions—very crudely, availability of water and farm or pasture land and the nature of the landscape—give rise to different types and sequences of occupation, and so to different types of archaeological evidence. So, trying to determine continuity on the basis of superimposed strata is not that easy, because the evidence is rarely definitive. In Moab, al-Bālū' (Worschech *et al.* 1989) and al-Lāhūn (Homès-Fredericq 1992) may show continuity from Late Bronze to Iron Age, though this is still unclear, but in general the density of occupation in the Late Bronze Age was less than in Ammon. Many scholars have pointed out in recent years that this lack of continuously occupied settlements reflects a population with an economy based on pastoralism (e.g. Dearman 1992: 73). Nevertheless, there

was some Late Bronze and Iron I settled occupation.

Once we get to Edom, the situation is different again. Here, there was no settled occupation at all during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (Bienkowski 1992: 5-8). It was Manfred Weippert, at the first of these conferences in 1980, who first argued for Iron I occupation in Edom, as opposed to the accepted explosion of settlement in Iron II (Weippert 1982). In recent years this point has generated much heated discussion, leading to some problem-oriented fieldwork (e.g. Bienkowski 1992; 1995a; Bienkowski *et al.* 1997; Bienkowski and Adams 1999; Finkelstein 1992a, b). Essentially, two types of evidence were presented for an Iron I occupation of Edom: Iron I pottery found on surveys of sites in northern Edom, and Iron I collared-rim jars found at excavated sites throughout Edom (Finkelstein 1992a, b). None of this evidence has survived close scrutiny (Bienkowski 1992: 104-10). The surveyed sites, when excavated, have yielded no Iron I occupation, and the survey pottery was found to be misidentified (Bienkowski *et al.* 1997; Bienkowski and Adams 1999). The collared-rim jar has been found, based on well stratified assemblages particularly from 'Umayrī and Jāwa, to have a long history and development in Jordan, and the examples from Edom are without doubt Iron II (Herr in press; Daviau 1992: 151). It is likely that the small site of Barqa al-Hitiya in the Faynān area, dated to Iron I by its excavator, should also be dated to Iron II, based on the shape of the collared-rim jars found there (Fritz 1994: 143 Fig. 11:8-9), although admittedly that would depend on the acceptance of a longer sequence for the 'Midianite' pottery found there, as has been proposed (Bawden and Edens 1988; cf. Parr 1988).

There is little doubt, then, that published evidence shows no Iron I in Edom, and the first settlements date no earlier than the late eighth century BC. However, recent work at a cemetery site in Wādī Fidān, an extension of Wādī Faynān in northern Edom, has provided rather a different kind of evidence. In 1997, Levy and Adams excavated fifty graves, mostly flexed burials without grave offerings but with lots of beads. One group, however, was formed of extended burials with preserved wooden bowls and pomegranates, but no pottery. An associated radiocarbon date puts this group in the tenth/ninth century BC (Levy, Adams and Shafiq 1999).

Of course, we must await proper analysis of these finds and the exact context of the radiocarbon sample. It is possible, though, that we do have here the first Iron Age burials ever found in Edom, with no pottery, and dating earlier than the Edomite settlements. If we are going to be imaginative, we might be tempted to associate these burials with the sort of pastoral nomadic groups which we know occupied the area of Edom during the second millennium BC, and are mentioned in Egyptian inscriptions (Kitchen 1992). There has never been any doubt that Edom was



occupied during the second millennium BC and the early first millennium BC, despite the lack of settlements, and these people must have died occasionally and been buried somewhere. It is possible that they have just been found.

It is less easy to pin down the reasons for increased settlement in Ammon, Moab and Edom during Iron II, and how and why they became actual states—and indeed, what sort of states were they? The origins of Ammon, Moab and Edom, and generally of Iron Age settlement, are attributed to three possible causes: the collapse of the Late Bronze Age system (McGovern 1987; Knauf 1992: 48); migrations of populations (Knauf *op. cit.*; van der Steen 1995: 68); or settlement and state formation by pre-existing populations, perhaps under external stimulus, such as the development of the Arabian trade or the effects of the *Pax Assyriaca* (Bienkowski 1992: 8). The argument that Iron Age sedentary occupation was precipitated by Canaanite migrants from Palestine has been propounded by Knauf (1992: 48-9), although there is no compelling evidence that the Iron Age inhabitants of Ammon, Moab and Edom originated outside (LaBianca and Younker 1995: 406).

Specifically regarding Edom, the re-opening of the copper mines at Faynān may well be related to renewed settled occupation and possibly even state formation (Bienkowski 1992: 8). There is no evidence for use of the mines during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. They were certainly in use in Iron II (Hauptmann and Weisgerber 1992). Recent sherding in Wādī Faynān by Barker as part of the Faynān Project has yielded more pottery of the type recorded by Hart and Knauf (1986) as non-Edomite Iron Age pottery, which Hart and Knauf found in association with 'standard Edomite' (i.e. seventh-sixth century BC) pottery. Barker's survey suggests that the two types can be found in isolation and that there may be a chronological distinction between them, perhaps hinting at the possibility of a pre-Edomite phase at Faynān (Barker *et al.* 1999).

Exactly when Ammon, Moab and Edom became states is arguable, but there is little evidence for early state formation, certainly not before the ninth century BC in Moab at any rate, and probably later in Ammon and Edom (Bienkowski 1992: 8; Miller 1992; LaBianca and Younker 1995: 406-7). If these states had a distinctive material culture, which is still to be demonstrated unequivocally, then it was not before fairly late in Iron II—but whether a distinctive material culture has anything to do with being a centralised state is debatable (cf. Knauf 1992).

### Regional Variation and the Nature of the Iron Age States

One of the most promising avenues of research in recent years has been precisely this point: what sort of states were these? The traditional picture we have inherited

from the Old Testament and from our interpretation of the Assyrian inscriptions is that these were centralised kingdoms, ruled by kings, with a capital, a state god, and a centralised administrative structure. One of the biggest differences in approach to fieldwork and research compared with twenty years ago is the systematic use of anthropological and sociological techniques. This has enabled us to look more critically at these so-called states, and in particular LaBianca and Younker (1995) have very convincingly argued that these were more tribal kingdoms than nation states.

This means that, at a local level, the political organisation and the unit of subsistence was the tribe, not the state, and, as Knauf has put it, there was only ever 'a thin veneer of central administration', and this was a society functioning 'on a level not penetrated by the state' (1992: 52). This hypothesis really does have strong explanatory power when we come to consider differences in material culture between sites and between regions, the reasons behind the demise or fading away of these kingdoms, and the apparent lack of change in the material culture after the states ended.

It is probably true that twenty years ago the material culture of Jordan was still regarded as a minor regional variation of that of Palestine, and perhaps this view still persists in some quarters. Two points need to be made clear. One is that, in general, the Iron Age of Jordan has a quite different character from that of Palestine: the pottery assemblages are quite different, and, for example, there is nothing in Palestine like the Ammonite sculptures (Abou-Assaf 1980). Secondly, there is increasing evidence of distinctive regional variations within Jordan itself, not only between the recognised 'states', but within them too.

In general, pottery assemblages from Edom, Moab, Ammon, and in the north are all different from each other. Of course there are similarities, but styles of painting on ceramics are different, surface finishes are different, simple bowl shapes are different, even bases are different (cf., for example, Hendrix *et al.* 1997: 170-202).

What do these regional variations mean? Recently, Herr (1997) and Daviau (1997) have separately looked at aspects of this problem. Does pottery represent regional or national assemblages (Herr 1997: 118, 151-4), and can variations help us to locate borders between states? Khirbat al-Mudayna in the north of Moab has pottery paralleled at Dhibān to the south, in particular disc bases, and a Moabite ostrakon, while Rujm al-Hiri, just 4 km to the north, has pottery paralleled at Jāwa, 'Umayri and 'Ammān in traditional 'Ammonite' territory, in particular, characteristic 'Ammonite' double disc bases. Furthermore, structures traditionally identified as watchtowers or forts, closely associated with these northern Moabite settlements, also had 'Moabite' pottery. Perhaps these structures marked Moab's northern border (Daviau



1997: 226-7). Of course, such structures varied in size, strength and function, and were probably used for a variety of purposes, including regional security, communication, storage and even care of flocks (cf. Kletter 1991; Dearman 1997: 205). However, if these forts did mark the northern border of Moab, then these pottery assemblages are national, and so, farther north, they may help us to determine where the elusive borders of Ammon were. It is not entirely certain if Ammon ever extended beyond Wādī az-Zarqā', which seems to be the limit for 'Ammonite' pottery, although of course these borders were changeable (Herr 1992a).

Nevertheless, categorising these assemblages neatly as 'national' is not the whole story, and it masks a potentially more complex situation. Herr very carefully refers to 'regional assemblages which are nuanced by national preferences in their core territories' (1997: 154; he also notes that these 'national' groups may change over time, attributing to Israel, for example, sites such as 'Arā'ir (Aroer) V, Lāhūn and as-Sa'idiyya X-IX, 1997: 121-3). But within the 'national' regions themselves there are also variations. In Edom, for example, painted pottery is not found on the distinctive 'mountain-top' sites in the region of Petra (Bienkowski 1995b: 52). A unique range of painted pottery and of very fine wares is found at Buṣayra (Oakeshott 1983). Particular wares are found only in the north of Edom. Particular krater or pithoi forms are measurably more common in the south than in the north of Edom (Bienkowski and Adams 1999). We cannot talk about a single 'Edomite assemblage' in pottery; each site and each area must be considered on its own merits. Within Moab too there are distinct regional differences, with different assemblages from sites such as Khirbat al-Mudayna and al-Bālū'a.

How can we explain these variations within states? At this point we can reconsider the notion of tribal kingdoms and consider what a 'national' assemblage of pottery means in these terms. Certainly in Edom, the pottery and architecture at Buṣayra constitute an exception. This was the capital, and it was impressive: it was meant to be (Bienkowski 1995b: 57-9). Compare the completely different pottery assemblage and architecture at Umm al-Biyāra in the south (Bienkowski 1995b: 56): there is little doubt that this was in theory as well as in practice part of the 'kingdom of Edom', because this is where the seal impression of Qos Gabr king of Edom was found (Bienkowski 1995b: 44). Here, precisely, is Knauf's 'thin veneer of central administration' (Knauf 1992: 52). If these were small, isolated settlements, tribally organised and probably with infrequent contact with the central administration, then what we would expect in terms of their material culture would be many local variations, especially in the more common pottery of everyday life, and a lack of the fine ware best known from the capital.

### Iron Age Routes

Once the discussion turns to 'isolated' settlements and 'infrequent contact', we have to consider of course the question of communication and routes. There is still general acceptance that there was a major north-south route through Jordan in the Iron Age, termed 'the King's Highway', more or less corresponding, with some variations, to the modern road of that name (Oded 1970; Eph'al 1984: 83; Herr 1997: 171). If this route did indeed exist, then it makes a slight nonsense of the idea of isolated settlements.

In this respect, we do not seem to have moved very far in twenty years, because at the 1980 conference, Miller argued, and has continued to argue since, that there is insufficient evidence for such a route in the Iron Age (Miller 1982: 173; 1989:12). It is worthwhile looking at this point once more. The idea of an Iron Age King's Highway goes back to Nelson Glueck: his view was that the biblical book of Numbers (20:17, 21:22) mentioned a 'King's Highway' (*derek hammelek*) from north to south through Moab and Edom, and in his survey he noticed a concentration of Iron Age sites along that route, which was essentially the route of the Roman Via Nova Traiana (Glueck 1940: 15). Miller noted that one of the biblical references was to Sinai, not Jordan, suggesting that in fact there were various routes which might have been called 'the royal road'. Secondly, Miller's Karak Plateau Survey noticed no such concentration of Iron Age sites along the Roman road (1982: 173).

It is usually assumed that the King's Highway was the route for the Arabian trade, which was certainly functioning by the seventh century BC if not earlier (Bienkowski 1992: 9 n.7). Nevertheless, that this was the actual route is no more than an assumption. The earliest evidence for the actual routes of the Arabian trade comes from the Hellenistic period, by which time the routes had changed because at least some of the trade already went by sea (Bowersock 1983: 64; Crone 1987: 18-26). We know the Nabataean route from Petra to Gaza went through the Negev (Cohen 1982). Syria and Mesopotamia are also mentioned as final destinations, but the route is not specified. We need not envisage a major overland route—Pliny tells us that frankincense was transported in Roman times through Minaean territory 'along one narrow track' (Natural History 12, 54). It has been suggested that a possible route was via Wādī as-Sirhān to the east, which was in fact shorter than the western route which culminated along the King's Highway (Bowersock 1983: 64, 154-9). This is a big problem, and it is clear that the route is debatable even for later times when at least there is some scanty evidence. For the Iron Age we have absolutely no evidence where it went. The relevance of this point is that we cannot use the Arabian trade as evidence for the existence of the



King's Highway in the Iron Age.

Perhaps we have to move away quite consciously from this idea of a major Iron Age north-south route, which may indeed have been an invention of Glueck's (who believed that the same north-south route was the main artery through Jordan from the Early Bronze Age to modern times). Iron Age roads were not paved, so admittedly they are difficult to trace archaeologically, but the evidence coming from more recent surveys is that there was an interwoven network of trails and optional routes. Dearman has pointed out two optional routes across Wādī al-Mūjib at 'Arā'ir and at Lāhūn, both well east of the Roman road; King Mesha of Moab claimed to have rebuilt a highway in the Arnon, also east of the Roman road (Dearman 1997: 206). In the 'Irāq al-Amīr region near 'Ammān, there may be evidence for a series of trails along the edges of wadis, marked by small 'forts' (Ji 1998). Maybe it is premature to discount completely the existence of an Iron Age road along the route of the later Roman road, since it is possible that the Romans built their paved road along an earlier trail, but it is salutary to realise that in fact there is no evidence for its existence in the Iron Age. Furthermore, considerable evidence from all periods is beginning to suggest that perhaps east-west routes were more significant than those north-south. Neutron activation analysis of pottery from Tall al-Fukhār shows that from the Middle Bronze Age to the late Iron Age/Persian period there were pottery imports from southern Palestine (McGovern 1997: 423-4), suggesting to McGovern (this volume) a route across the highlands of Palestine to either Tall as-Sa'idiyya or Pella, and from there to Irbid and farther east. Herr too has stressed east-west contacts rather than those north-south in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages (1998; 1997: 171).

### Jordan and Mesopotamia

The question of the King's Highway was further clouded by the assumption, which has gained a tenacious foothold in the literature, that it was part of the Assyrian 'royal road' system, and indeed it was from there that the biblical writers borrowed the name (Oded 1970). For too long there has been the assumption that Assyria in effect directly ruled the Jordanian Iron Age states. There is in fact no evidence at all for actual Assyrian presence anywhere in Jordan. If there was a King's Highway, it had nothing to do with the carefully maintained Assyrian royal road (Bienkowski in press); in Assyrian sources, there is no mention of the 'royal road' (*harran* or *hul šarri*) anywhere west of the Euphrates (Kessler 1997: 131). Ammon, Moab and Edom were tributary states, which paid tribute when required and performed some other tasks. They were not provinces, and they were not considered part of Assyria (Millard 1992; Bienkowski 1992: 3-5; in press). The evidence is quite clear that the Assyrian royal

road ran only through Assyria proper and its provinces. Moreover, there is no evidence for the presence of Assyrian officials in Jordan. Much is made of 'Assyrian' or 'Assyrianising' pottery found at Iron Age sites, as evidence of Assyrian presence, although excavators often do not make a distinction between what they consider actual Assyrian pottery, and what is a local imitation, Assyrianising pottery. Real Assyrian pottery, of the type known especially from Nimrud, has been found at sites in Palestine, like Tall Jammah, where there is other evidence of Assyrian presence. But, to the writer's knowledge, not a single sherd of real Assyrian pottery has been found on any site in Jordan (Bienkowski in press).

The only firm evidence for Mesopotamian presence during the Iron Age in Jordan is the relief at as-Sila' (Sela), near Buṣayra (Dalley and Goguel 1997). This shows a standing king, above him a crescent and a star, and an illegible inscription. Analysis of the style of the relief identifies the figure almost certainly as the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (555-539 BC). Dalley and Goguel (1997: 174) propose that the relief was carved to commemorate Nabonidus' journey through Edom towards Tayma, perhaps in years 3 or 4 of his reign (i.e. ca. 553-552 BC), and suggest that the presence of the relief in as-Sila' implies that Edom was under (direct?) Babylonian administration at that time.

Unfortunately, the administrative position of Transjordan in Neo-Babylonian times, and what happened to the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom, is not at all clear. Ammon and Moab are not mentioned in any contemporary inscriptions. According to Josephus (*Antiquities* 10.9:7), Nebuchadnezzar conquered Ammon and Moab in 582/1 BC, and most scholars interpret this as meaning that Ammon and Moab were annexed at this point and were henceforth ruled directly from Babylon (e.g. Ahlström 1993: 801). Josephus does not explicitly state this, however; indeed, although he mentions the exile of Jews to Babylon in the same passage, he makes no mention of the exile of Ammonites or Moabites, which might be expected to have automatically followed a full annexation.

Edom may appear in the Nabonidus Chronicle for his third year, 553 BC, but the signs are broken and the exact reading is not certain (Beaulieu 1989: 166, 169; Grayson 1975: 105, 282). What is normally restored is: 'He/they encamped against the land of Edom' or 'against the city of Edom'. This is usually understood as meaning a siege of Buṣayra, Edom's capital, and the annexation of Edom (Bartlett 1989: 157-61; Ahlström 1993: 805), but the evidence is scarcely conclusive.

Ammon, Moab and Edom may therefore have been annexed by the Neo-Babylonians, but conclusive proof is lacking, although admittedly it is unlikely that they survived as independent kingdoms into the Persian period



(Eph'al 1988: 142). Herr has recently argued that the late Iron II administrative buildings at 'Umayri, and associated wine-producing farmsteads, were built during the Neo-Babylonian period in order to pay the increased tribute brought on by Babylonian rule (Herr 1997: 170). It is not at all clear that tribute would have been any different than under Assyrian rule (although if Ammon was under direct Babylonian rule, as perhaps implied by Josephus, technically this would have been tax, not tribute); but what the discoveries at 'Umayri have very usefully done is to show conclusively, really for the first time, that these late Iron II sites continued through the Neo-Babylonian and into the Persian period.

### The Persian Period

Twenty years ago it was still the standard explanation that the kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom were brought to an end by the Babylonians, possibly with a wholesale destruction of sites, and there was little if any evidence for Persian-period occupation (e.g. Bennett 1983: 17). In fact, nothing at all was known about the organisation of Jordan during the Persian period. It was generally concluded, on very little evidence, that Edom and Moab at least were overrun by nomadic Arab tribes (cf. Eph'al 1984: 198). Archaeological evidence for Persian-period settlement in Jordan was not widespread enough to counter this view. Although there were isolated tomb deposits and a few other finds in Jordan dated to the Persian period, there was no proper excavated sequence of material that could be shown unambiguously to date to the period: the evidence from al-Mazār (Yassine 1984; 1988a, b; Yassine and Teixidor 1988), Ḥisbān (Sauer in Merling and Geraty 1994: 246-8; Cross and Geraty in Merling and Geraty 1994: 172-4; Merling in Merling and Geraty 1994: 215-6), Dayr 'Allā (van der Kooij 1987; van der Kooij and Ibrahim 1989: 89-90) and as-Sa'idiyya (Pritchard 1985: 60-8, 86-7) was simply not secure enough.

The ongoing excavations at 'Umayri have now provided good stratigraphic evidence for continuity from Iron II to the Persian period (Herr 1993; 1995). Two continuously occupied strata bridge the sixth century BC: alongside Attic sherds of the fifth century BC is local pottery indistinguishable from that of Iron II. Increasingly, it seems that there is continuity from Iron II, through the Persian period and perhaps into the Hellenistic period. Many surveys and excavations have identified little or no diagnostic Persian material, but in fact we should now acknowledge that in some of these at least there may be an element of continuity from Iron II into the Persian period without much of a definable change in the material culture, and this is the case over the whole of Jordan.

There is also some evidence that Ammon might have been a Persian province. Three stamped impressions on jars from 'Umayri, written in Aramaic and dating to the

late sixth or early fifth century BC, have been interpreted as the Ammonite equivalent of the Yehud stamps from Judah, which contained the name of the Persian province and probably served as a stamp on goods in the Persian provincial tax system (Herr 1992b). If this is correct, the 'Umayri stamps may name governors or treasurers of the Persian province of Ammon. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that governors were members of the local ethnic groups (Eph'al 1988: 151-52), so there is no need to envisage a large influx of native Persians or of Persian material culture.

Of course, even if there was a Persian province of Ammon, we do not know what its borders were, nor do we know the status of Edom and Moab. The traditional views of Edom at the end of the Iron Age and into the Persian period have been that in the seventh and sixth centuries BC the Edomites took advantage of Judah's weakness and invaded the Negev and the southern border of Judah, or that from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC they were pushed westwards by invading Arabs and gradually settled in parts of the Negev. The evidence for these scenarios is the 'Edomite' pottery found at sites in the Negev, for example the 'Edomite cult site' of Horvat Qitmit, and the fact that in the Hellenistic period the name Idumaea, derived from Edom, referred to the area south of Judah (Beit-Arieh 1995).

All of this is a question of interpretation. The archaeological evidence on its own certainly does not prove any sort of Edomite domination of the Negev—Qitmit has been alternatively explained as a shrine serving a wide clientele, which included pastoral nomads, among them Edomites, Arabs and probably others (Finkelstein 1995: 139-53; Bienkowski 1995c: 139). Up to now, no building definitely identified as a shrine has been found in Edom as a comparison, nor any anthropomorphic ceramic vessels comparable to those from Qitmit (Beit-Arieh 1995) and 'En Haseva (Cohen and Yisrael 1995), although there are some similarities in figurines from Buṣayra (Bienkowski and Sedman *fc*). In fact, the closest parallels to the Qitmit and 'En Haseva vessels, which have been identified as Edomite, have recently been found in Moab, at Site 13 of the Regional Survey of the Wādī ath-Thamad Archaeological Project (Daviau 1997: 225-7), although their association with Moabite culture and religion is not yet understood. Clearly it is premature to link this sort of material exclusively with either Edomites or Moabites.

As for the linguistic evidence, Bartlett has recently argued that the name Idumaea actually had nothing at all to do with the Iron Age kingdom of Edom, on the basis that by the fourth century BC there was little clear, academic recollection of the ancient kingdom of Edom and its precise territory, and that the name 'Idumaea' was based on a geographical term 'Edom' which was often applied loosely to the land generally south of the Iron Age



kingdom of Judah (1998). Clearly there is a debate here (cf. Herr 1997: 173-5), but at the very least it has certainly been established that Edom was not an unsettled nomad's-land during the Persian period, into which wandered Qedarites or proto-Nabataeans or other Arab tribes, pushing out the Edomite population. As far as we can tell, population and settlements continued, if not the 'state' of Edom (Bartlett 1990). There is still no conclusive archaeological evidence concerning continuity between Edomite and Nabataean settlements (Bartlett 1990; Bienkowski 1990), although further north it appears that there was continuity of settlement from Iron II through the Persian period and into the Hellenistic period, at least at 'Umayri (Herr 1993), as-Sa'idiyya (Pritchard 1985), and Fikhār (Strange 1997: 403-5).

### Back to Basics?

It must be admitted that the chronology of this late Iron II and Persian period is still very uncertain. We cannot say conclusively when sites were destroyed or abandoned, and of course there is a similar problem, certainly in Edom, with dating the beginning of the Iron Age. This is a question of the basics of archaeology. Basic chronology is fundamental before we can seriously ask more searching questions, and we still do not have a definitive chronology for Iron Age pottery. There is still no published stratigraphically based pottery chronology for the Iron Age to Persian periods, although in due course this will be provided by the excavations at 'Umayri and Jālūl (Younker *et al.* 1996), as-Sa'idiyya (Tubb 1988), Jāwa (Daviau 1992), al-Fikhār (Strange 1997) and some other sites; meanwhile the detailed interim reports of the Madaba Plains Project partly fill the gap (e.g. Herr *et al.* 1997). But we must be aware that, with the strong regional variation in Iron Age Jordan, there can never be anything like a 'type site'—that is an outmoded concept.

This strong regionalism in Iron Age Jordan leads to problems with surface surveys: if a project is surveying a relatively unknown region, then what can it base its pottery dating on? So far, most of the surveys that have included Iron Age sites have had their pottery read in a fairly subjective way (cf. Finkelstein 1998). When checked against excavated pottery, once surveyed sites were dug, very often the survey readings have been shown to be wrong (MacDonald 1996). So we cannot rely on surveys to give us a reliable picture of settlement patterns and densities through the Iron Age. For example, surveys suggested a slow build up of settlement in northern Edom, around Wādī al-Ḥasā, through the Late Bronze Age into Iron I, and this scenario became widely accepted. Excavations have shown that there was no Late Bronze or Iron I at all (Bienkowski 1995a; Bienkowski *et al.* 1997; Bienkowski and Adams 1999). Sometimes, the main value of a survey is simply to register the existence of a site,

and for very large parts of Jordan we still do not have even that. This must be a priority for the immediate future. For example, large parts of the south have not been touched since Glueck's survey, and he too was highly selective.

The second priority is final publication: very little has appeared in final form for the Iron Age (Pritchard 1985; McGovern 1986; Pratico 1993; Bennett and Bienkowski 1995 appear to be the only examples). Of course, as older excavations, like Buṣayra or Ḥisbān, are eventually published, the results reflect research questions, field methodologies and recording systems that are now outmoded. We cannot expect them to answer the questions we pose now.

As a result of this lack of conclusive data, we must realise that we still do not know many of the basics, and there is a danger of erecting a huge interpretative edifice on extremely shaky foundations. Essentially, we are still creating the basic framework for understanding Iron Age Jordan: we must be realistic in judging what sort of questions present evidence can withstand.

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